

Edison Shop
229 South Wabash Avenue
west side of Wabash Avenue be-
tween Adams and Jackson Streets
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1044

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
46-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ILL-1044

THE EDISON SHOP

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Location: 229 South Wabash Avenue, west side of Wabash Avenue between Adams and Jackson Streets; Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Present Owner: J. & R. Investment Company.

Present Occupant: Hung Fa Village.

Present Use: Chinese Restaurant and Key Club.

Statement of Significance: The only down-town Chicago Office Building by Purcell, Fieck, & Elmslie. The building is noted for its use of brick and terra-cotta ornament in conjunction with large expanse of glass on the west front. Designated Chicago Architectural Landmark 1959.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of the property: South one-third of lot 6, block 5, fraction section 15-39-14, surveyed and subdivided by the Board of Canal Commissioners pursuant to law in the month of April, year of 1836. Ante fire, recorded June 13, 1836, re-recorded September 24, 1877 (Document 151619).

The following is based on the chain of title recorded in book 461, pp. 125, 366 in the Cook County Recorder of Deeds Office; a number of owners had the property prior to 1912. Thomas J. Cavanaugh sold the property to Harry Dubia, August 31, 1912 (Document 5035081). Cavanaugh subsequently redeemed the property on April 4, 1913 (Document 5159171). The property was tied up in litigation with Cavanaugh and later his estate between 1933 and 1945. On June 6, 1945 Max Goldenberg purchased the property (Document 14217307). He sold it to Quong Jung, Inc., January 9, 1958 (Document 17107688). Control was assumed by J. & R. Investment Company, August 6, 1963 (Document 63U39320).

2. Date of erection: 1912.
3. Architects: Purcell, Fieck & Elmslie.

George Grant Elmslie was Purcell's senior by nine years. Born of Scottish parentage at Huntley, Scotland, in 1871, Elmslie came to America with his family in the early eighties. Following his general education, a year was spent in business

school before he entered the architectural office of J. L. Silsbee, where Wright and Maher were already employed.² Wright, who left Silsbee in 1887 to become a draftsman and designer for Sullivan, was instrumental in obtaining for Elmslie a position in the Adler and Sullivan office. This took place in 1890. After the dissolution of the Adler and Sullivan firm in 1895, Elmslie remained with Sullivan. During this latter period Elmslie was Sullivan's chief assistant, and as time progressed, he played a more and more important role in the office. As Wright before him had created part of the Auditorium Building ornament, so too, Elmslie drew much of the ornament for the Carson, Pirie and Scott Store. Elmslie may likewise have made important contributions to the design of the National Farmer's Bank in Owatonna, Minnesota. But Elmslie's most direct role was in the area of domestic design. Residential work never held much fascination for Sullivan, and in the late eighties and early nineties Wright had assumed much of the responsibility for such work. Likewise to Elmslie went a major portion of the task of designing the only two residences contracted by Sullivan after 1895. These were the Henry Babson house at Riverside, Illinois (1907), and the Harold C. Bradley house at Madison, Wisconsin (1909).

Concerning Elmslie's role under Sullivan in the early years of the century, Frank Lloyd Wright later recalled, "I saw that he /Sullivan/ had been leaning heavily on George Grant Elmslie who was still with him at the time these last buildings were being done. But for George at this time he could have done little or nothing. Loyal George!"³ Whereas there is every reason to agree with the first sentence, Wright's final statement would seem entirely unfair. Such excellent banks as those at Grinnell, Iowa, (1914), Sidney, Ohio, (1917-18), and Columbus, Wisconsin, (1919), followed after Elmslie's departure. Surely one should hesitate to label them as "little or nothing."

With an ever decreasing number of commissions coming into the Sullivan office, Elmslie left in 1909 to enter into partnership with his old friend William Gray Purcell, who, two years before, had opened an office in Minneapolis with George Fieck.

Purcell, unlike Elmslie, was entirely a product of the Midwest. Born in Chicago in 1880, and educated in the public schools in Oak Park, he early acquired an intimate knowledge of Chicago's architecture. A near neighbor in Oak Park was Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work Purcell admired even as a boy.

In 1899, Purcell entered Cornell University; upon graduation in 1903, he spent a few months in Sullivan's office.

²Biographical information was obtained from the following sources: David S. Gebhard Purcell and Elmslie Architects, 1910-1922, (Exhibition catalogue published by the Walker Art Center), Minneapolis, 1953; Biographical Notes by George G. Elmslie, MS on Microfilm #7, Burnham Library; Talbot F. Hamlin, "George Grant Elmslie and the Chicago Scene," Pencil Points, XXII, 1941, pp. 575-586; Hugh Morrison, Louis Sullivan, New York, 1935; The first two sources also furnished information for Purcell's biography.

³Frank Lloyd Wright. Genius and the Mobocracy, New York: 1949, p. 72.

H. Allen Brooks, The Prairie School, The American Spirit in Midwest Residential Architecture, 1893-1916 (Evanston, Illinois, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Northwestern University, June, 1957), pp. 94-96.

4. Builder: J. Rodetz - Rookery Building, Chicago.
5. Original plans, construction, etc.: The date of the original structure is unknown. The present building is original with Purcell, Fieck and Elmslie's store front replacing the original on the west (front) side. A stair was also added at the time of this work. The earliest permit (A8682) is for this store front addition, stair and patch work. The permit lists the Babson Brothers as owners, but their name appears nowhere on the chain of title.
6. Alterations and additions: A number of minor changes have been made to the building in addition to a major renovation of the first floor front in 1933. (See permit #83597, February 16, 1933, file #243271). Records located on 4th floor, City of Chicago office building, 320 North Clark Street).

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The building was remodeled for use by the Babson Bros. for the display and sales of Edison phonographic equipment. While still employed by Sullivan, Elmslie had helped in the design of a residence for Henry Babson at Riverside, Illinois. The firm of Purcell and Elmslie was later to do the service building for the Babson residence.

C. Bibliography:

"Bibliography of Purcell articles in Northwest Architect from 1940-48," Northwest Architect, Vol. 12, #2 (April-May, 1948). P. 9.

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A reprint is in the pamphlet file of the Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Gebhard, David S. A Catalogue of the Exhibit of the Architectural Works and Projects of Purcell and Elmslie in the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. (held March 7, to April 24, 1953).
A copy of this catalogue exists in the pamphlet file of the Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Hamlin, Talbot. "George Grant Elmslie and the Chicago Scene," Pencil Point, Vol. XXII (September, 1941). P. 578.

Microfilm of working drawings on Edison Building in Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago, roll 22, frames 84-94.

Purcell, W.G. and Elmslie, G.G. "An American Renaissance," Craftsman, Vol. 21 (January, 1912). P. 430-35.

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"Purcell and Elmslie," Northwest Architect, Vol. 8 (July, 1944). P. 20.

"Purcell and Elmslie," Northwest Architect, Vol. 17, #1 (January-February, 1953). P. 16 and 8 plates following p. 18.

Purcell, William Gray. "Elmslie Orchestration," Architectural Forum, Vol. 86 (February, 1947). P. 22.
This was a letter to the editor.

Purcell, William Gray. "This too Might be History," American Society of Architectural Historians Journal, Vol. 3, #4 (October, 1943). Pp. 16-25.

Rendering of Edison Shop, reproduced in Chicago Architectural Club Catalogue, Vol. 26 (1913). P. 22.

Spencer, R.C., Jr. "A Small House of Bricks in Suburbs and Country Houses by Walter Burley Griffin, Tallmadge and Watson, and William Gray Purcell," Brickbuilder, Vol. 20 (October, 1911). Pp. 209-16.

"Statics and Dynamics in Architecture," Western Architect, Vol. 19 (January, 1913). Pp. 1-10 and plates following p. 10.

"The Work of Purcell and Elmslie - Part I," Western Architect, Vol. 22 (January, 1915). P. 3 and plates following.

"The Work of Purcell and Elmslie - Part II," Western Architect, Vol. 22 (July, 1915). P. 7 and plates following.

"Woodbury County Court House," Western Architect, Vol. 30 (February, 1921). Pp. 13-20 and 21 plates following p. 20. Associated Architects with William L. Steele.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The only down-town Chicago office building by the architectural firm Purcell and Elmslie. The open facade and carefully detailed brick work have been cited by the "Commission on Architectural Landmarks."
2. Condition of fabric: Fair. The owner indicates that the building will be razed in four years when the present occupant's lease expires. Original drawings (on microfilm in the Art Institute of Chicago) carry notations which indicate that another building existed on the site, and that the present structure was remodeled with the present front added.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Number of stories: Four.
2. Overall dimensions: Approximately 25' x 170'.
3. Layout-shape: Rectangular.

4. Wall construction, finish, color: Light beige brick on party wall ends, full height piers and spandrels of west (front) elevation. Terra-cotta ornament at pier capitals and near top of parapet.
 5. Structural system, framing: Bearing wall.
 6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Service door on the east (rear) side. Main entrance at west (front) is not original.
 - b. Windows: Fixed plate glass windows between piers from ceiling to 38" sill on the second, third and fourth floors of west (front) facade. Small decorative glass operating units between piers and party walls on west (front) facade at second, third and fourth floors. Later ground floor window is plate glass. Some small ventilating sash on east (rear) wall.
 7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat, built-up.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Terra-cotta cornice caps a brick parapet which has a terra-cotta decorative detail in the center.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor Plans:
 - a. Basement: dressing rooms, storage, mechanical equipment.
 - b. First floor: Restaurant and kitchen.
 - c. Second floor: Private dining-rooms.
 - d. Third floor: Private Key Club.
 - e. Fourth floor: Storage.
 2. Stairways: Original stairways from basement to roof are on north wall near front. Secondary stair on north wall near rear now carries only from basement to first floor. Service elevator near rear stair, and passenger elevator near front stair.
 3. Flooring: 2- $\frac{1}{4}$ " oak strip flooring. Key Club and first floor dining room have some carpet and asphalt tile. Second floor private dining room has asphalt tile.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, painted.
5. Lighting: Electrical.
6. Heating: Central.

D. Site:

General setting and orientation: The building faces west on the east side of Wabash Avenue between Adams and Jackson Streets. Buildings on either side have been razed.

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